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Modernist Revolutions: American Poetry and the Paradigm of the New

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(Women Writing) The Modernist Line

Cristanne Miller

1 In his "Revolution of the Word" manifesto (*Transition*, 1929), Eugene Jolas writes that "the literary creator [...] HAS THE RIGHT TO USE WORDS OF HIS OWN FASHIONING AND TO DISREGARD EXISTING GRAMMATICAL AND SYNTACTICAL LAWS."[1] Jolas does not mention any aspect of poetic structure or "laws" as part of his revolution—perhaps because by 1929 free verse was so dominantly the poetic mode. One structural aspect, however, distinguished the modernist revolution in poetry from earlier free verse—namely the line. Of the five English-language poets who experimented most radically with the poetic line in the 1910s, four were women: Mina Loy, H.D., Marianne Moore, and Gertrude Stein. The crucial moves away from Whitman's nineteenth-century aesthetic had to do with the line as seen, as independent of syntax and meter, as restructuring the possibilities of rhyme, and as a unit in tension with other aspects of form, narrative, and voice in a poem. In the hands of these women, by the end of 1917 the modernist line had appeared in almost every radical configuration it would reach throughout the period of high modernism.

2 Pound is the fifth of these innovators, and while his work undoubtedly had an impact on these women, their innovations also influenced his Cantos (first published in *Poetry* in 1917) and they certainly influenced William Carlos Williams's visually disjointed and later "triadic" line.[2] In his multiple books published before 1916, Pound wrote a variety of kinds of lines but most of his lines were phrasally determined; he sometimes indented words or phrases but typically maintained both minor phrase boundaries and stanzaic or flush-left line groups. T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens never left the phrasal line behind, and e.e. cummings first published his radically vertical verse in 1920. Of primary interest here is not who first used any particular line structure. Were that the case, one could say that the modernists invented nothing: prose poetry, free verse, and concrete poetry or other verse forms using the visual space of the page can all be found well before the turn of the twentieth century. Instead, I am interested in the work of poets who developed particular uses of the line in primary ways as an aspect of their

attempt to write a poetry appropriate to the new century such that these formal elements could not be ignored or overlooked by others engaged in similar experiments with meaning and form.[3]

3 Loy, H.D., Stein, and Moore redefine the line by altering its length, relation to syntax and pauses, and its visual form. The fact that women are primarily responsible for initial reconceptions of the modernist poetic line is rarely noticed, however—perhaps because they did not publish manifestos that touted their own contributions to modernism, instead focusing their essays on other issues or on modernist poetry generally. While Pound wrote multiple essays extolling the do's and don'ts of modernist verse, and Williams described his variable foot as his "solution of the problem of modern verse" (Williams in Berry), Loy, H.D., Moore, and Stein wrote mostly obliquely about their formal verse structures. Loy's most important polemical essays, for example, are on Futurism, Psycho-Democracy, and Feminism, and Moore's most important essays are on rhyme and gusto in other writing, or on other writers.[4] At the beginning of their poetic careers, however, these women in fact "solved" one of the "problem[s] of modern verse" by creating signature forms for the articulation of their ideas. And because (as we know—and as Rachel Blau DuPlessis has argued) form does not occur in a vacuum (DuPlessis, 2001), in talking about the line I will talk at least briefly about the social, historical, and political terrain engaged by these women's reconception of this element of form. A line is a unit of verse but also of general communication—structurally and rhetorically crafted. In common parlance, a "line" is often mistrusted: "What's his line?" we ask, "Don't feed me a line," we warn. Or a line can be a kind of signature or by-line. In these women's verse the modernist "line" is redefined both as structure and perspective.

4 These variations in the conception and form or the poetic line are not gender-dependent or gender-oriented. At the same time, it is unlikely to be a matter of accident that most of the individuals responsible for repeated experimental and developmental use of new forms of the poetic line written in English are women. As I have argued elsewhere, in the U.S. more than anywhere else in the world, women took leadership roles in shaping the development and circulation of modernism across the spectrum of the arts in the 1910s and 1920s. They were editors, museum founders, and organizers of groups or loosely conceived communities.[5] The women engaged in such leadership were well educated, ambitious, and enjoyed sufficient independence financially and in relation to familial responsibilities to afford at least periodic sustained focus on their art (although this independence was more precarious and harder won for some than for others). Moreover, these women may have felt weaker ties to traditional institutions and forms than their male contemporaries because they for the most part stood outside those institutions. The focus of this essay, however, is not on the question of gender in relation to the development of the modernist line; nor is it on who or what influenced Loy, H.D., Stein, or Moore's experimentation. I focus on the particularities of these women's innovative, and typically overlooked, contributions to the development of Anglo-American modernism and ways that their deployment of a new poetic line was compatible with larger (often feminist) goals of their poetics.

Loy's Line

5 Although H.D. is the earliest of these writers, Mina Loy approaches the question of the line with the greatest variety of placement on the physical page, perhaps not surprisingly given that she both began and ended her career with serious work in the visual arts. For that reason, this essay begins with Loy's line.

6 Mina Loy's most famous (or infamous) lines are those beginning "Songs to Joannes," the first four sections of which were published as "Love Songs" in 1915:

> Spawn of Fantasies
> Silting the appraisable
> Pig Cupid his rosy snout
> Rooting erotic garbage
> "Once upon a time"
> Pulls a weed white star-topped
> Among wild oats sown in mucous-membrane (1996, 53)

7 While most attention has focused on Loy's shockingly comic representation of male participation in intercourse as a pig-like penis "rooting erotic garbage," it is equally significant that by 1915 her widening of the line to include white space between words was already a recognizable feature of her verse. Pound uses this technique (to my knowledge) only once, in "In a Station of the Metro" as published in *Poetry* in 1913:

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
> Petals on a wet, black bough .

8 In contrast, this was a repeated aspect of Loy's verse and hence one she brought insistently to the attention of other modernists.

9 Loy writes in "Modern Poetry" that "the structure of all poetry is the movement that an active individuality makes in expressing itself" (1996, 157). Loy's lines "move" individualistically; they are characteristically short, often organized by syntactic repetition or sound play rather than by syntactic units, and they either eschew punctuation or use it as a visual as much as a rhetorical marker. As Suzanne Churchill notes, however, her use of white space mid-line is her "signature formal device" from her earliest publications (118). In the 1914 poem "Parturition," Loy writes:

> Locate an irritation without
> It is within
> Within
> It is without
>
> The sensitized area
>
> Is identical with the extensity
>
> Of intension (1996, 4, stanza 3)

10 In this poem about the labor of birthing, Loy marks the visceral materiality of pain and the mother's simultaneous experience of wonder with disorienting spatial placement of words on the page. The fetus within will soon be the child "without." It is and is not a part of the mother's body. "Intension" puns on the painful tension of labor and "intention," or what the mother intends; "extensity" similarly puns on extent and tenseness. Given that "intension" is also a linguistic term signifying any quality connoted by a word or symbol, or that which makes the word signify, one can read this phrase of Loy's as pointing at her own use of language. "The sensitized area / Is

identical with the extensity / Of intension": Loy's poetic "intensions" have extensity and are inseparable from them; they also give birth or bear fruit. Perhaps this combined sensitivity and fertility of extensive intension defines Loy's "line."

11 A 1915 poem, "The Effectual Marriage, Or the Insipid Narrative of Gina and Miovanni" may be Loy's first use of what Williams later develops as a "triadic line"—that is, a diagonal extension of the line across the page. Loy writes:

> Of what their peace consisted
> We cannot say
> Only that he was magnificently man
> She insignificantly a woman who understood
> Understanding what is that
> To Each his entity to others
> their idiosyncrasies to the free expansion
> to the annexed their liberty
> To man his work
> To woman her love
> Succulent meals and an occasional caress
> So be it
> It so seldom is (1996, 37-38)

12 Loy rarely uses this device, more frequently extending the line through line-internal spacing rather than diagonally, but (like Pound) she has several unique or occasional experiments with the spacing of lines. In "Brancusi's Golden Bird" (1922), lines are flush left, except that a single line is printed 6 spaces further to the left than any other; appropriately, that line consists only of the words "As if." "Apology of Genius" (1922) begins with the flush-left line "Ostracized as we are with God" and the rest of the poem's lines begin further to the right—as it were ostracizing the first line by constituting a new margin. In "Poe" (composed 1917-18), Loy sets two lines further to the left than others: the first constitutes its own stanza and the second is a one-word line in stanza 3.

> a lyric elixir of death
>
> embalms
> the spindle spirits of your hour glass loves
> on moon spun nights
>
> sets
> icicled canopy
> for corpses of poesy
> with roses and northern lights
>
> Where frozen nightingales in ilix aisles
> sing burial rites (1996, 76)

13 The poem contains only one capital letter—beginning what is apparently an internal modifying clause near the end of the poem—and it has no punctuation. Its line lengths vary from the one syllable "sets" to the iambic pentameter "Where frozen nightingales in ilix aisles," and its stanzas vary from one to four lines. In the 1917 "Songs to Joannes" Loy writes whole sections that are only a line long—most prominently at the poem's conclusion: "Love - - - the preeminent litterateur" (XXXIV, 1996, 68).

14 As this line indicates, Loy's punctuation similarly redefines the page as a visual canvas; one might even think of this as a geometrical line filling the space of poetic lineation.

In "Songs to Joannes," dashes function in standard parenthetical fashion but they may also constitute an entire line: "Our souvenir ethics to / — — — — — — — (XXX, 1996, 66). In section XXXII, dashes replace ellipses to indicate an unfinished thought and, in this case, unfinished sentence: "where the Mediterranean — — — — —" (1996, 67). Even more strikingly, Loy sometimes begins a line with dashes: "Unthinkable that white over there / — — — Is smoke from your house" (XXVIII, 1996, 65). Because there are no extant manuscript copies of most of Loy's poems, it is not possible to know just how she intended these geometrical lines, or dashes, to appear on the page.

15 Although Loy occasionally writes a one word line, this is not a typical feature of her verse; hence the passage she centers in "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" (1925), giving each word its own line, calls dramatic attention to her protagonist's discovery of the lucent radiance of "the word" or aesthetic understanding (141).

> And instantly
> this fragmentary
> simultaneity
> of ideas
>
> embodies
> the word
> A
> lucent
> iris
> shifts
> its
> irradiate
> interstice
> glooms and relumes
> on an orb of verdigris[6]

16 Loy uses line breaks, white space within lines, punctuation, and other visual elements of the page as guides to reading: for rhetorical, aural, and rhythmic effect.[7]

17 As an art student and painter, Loy knew avant-garde art and artists and her stylistic features borrow from its patterns. Loy's poems combine the aggressive visual elements of Futurism and the baroque detail of Decadence with a feminist commitment to representing a woman's perspective and celebrating female sexuality. In "Summer Night in a Florentine Slum," Loy even refers to a print by English Decadent Aubrey Beardsley. In his work, she would have found an ostentatiously contrived artificiality, blurring so-called natural categories of gender and sexuality and eroticizing the depiction of all embodiments. Like Beardsley's drawings, Loy's language is contrived, artificial, and excessive. It combines various registers of experience and favors obscure or highly specialized vocabularies—often juxtaposed with slang or multilingual wordplay (see Perloff and Reid). Loy also manipulates alliteration at times with such exaggeration as to all but cancel its lyrical effects—as it were, de-naturalizing even the aesthetics of sound. For example, in "Café du Néant," a woman "Prophetically blossoms in perfect putrefaction" (1996, 17). Loy's satires of life and relationship in England, Paris, and Florence represent her critique of a patriarchal social, economic, and religious system in which women's lives are restricted by structures privileging men. In "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots," Loy writes: "Nobody shouts / Virgins for sale" yet "Marriage [is] expensive"—a painful reality for women trapped "behind curtains" watching "men pass / They are going somewhere" (1996, 22). Loy highlights both

women's delusional faith in fictions of romance and what Alex Goody calls "the double bind of dominant ideology and economic hegemony" (Goody, 108; see also Kinnahan). The visual and verbal patterns of Loy's poetry suggest that her rewriting of the line is of a piece with her feminist satire of social norms.

H.D.: Words and Sounds

18 Loy's extravagantly mannered style stands in distinct contrast to the language play of her female American contemporaries, but her experiments with the line and impatience with entrenched structures and attitudes of male privilege have much in common with theirs. Like Loy's, H.D.'s line is in part defined by sound-play. Beginning in 1912, H.D. was developing a use of repetition and syncopated rhyme to produce a line of radical brevity and extraordinarily full sound.[8] The crisply intense lucidity of presence embodied in her brief lines is strikingly different from Loy's archaic and erudite profusion of words and images. In "Hermes of the Ways" (1913), H.D. writes in lines that are frequently only one or two words, or even one or two syllables, long:

> Wind rushes
> over the dunes,
> and the coarse, salt-crusted grass
> answers.
>
> Heu,
> it whips round my ankles!" (42)

19 The brevity of these lines is intensified by the fact that H.D. writes primarily in monosyllables. In the 1915 "Garden," her speaker addresses a rose: "If I could break you / I could break a tree. / If I could stir / I could break a tree— / I could break you" (24-25). The line H.D. defined in her early Imagist poems remained the core line of her verse—just as Loy's early line did.

20 H.D.'s line is typically syntactically defined, monosyllabic, Anglo-Saxon in word base, and involves extensive repetition. It is often anaphoric, but the effect is strikingly different from Whitman's earlier anaphora because her lines are so short. Hence the words that differ from one line to the next are at times fewer than the repeated words: "I could break a tree. / . . . I could break a tree— / I could break you." H.D.'s innovations focus not on manipulation of visual space per se but on the line as a tool for the nuanced, measured process of thinking (or articulating thought as a process) through repetition of words and sounds. Hence the syntactic and visual elements reinforce each other in calling attention to the smallest units of this process. Her line gives utmost weight to individual words and sounds, in relation to longer patterns of sound and meaning.

21 H.D.'s verse is distinctive for its one-word lines. "The Wind Sleepers" begins: "Whiter / than the crust / left by the tide, / we are stung by the hurled sand / and the broken shells." The third stanza similarly begins with one word: "Tear— / tear us an altar, / tug at the cliff-boulders, / pile them with the rough stones—." Here the initial isolation of "Tear" is emphasized through the repetition of the word followed by the anaphora of other imperative verbs: tear, tear, tug, pile. "Red Roses for Bronze" begins with internal rhyme (take/weight/sate), emphasized by its very short second line, and then plays with rhyme and repetition throughout the opening passage:[9]

If I might take a weight of bronze
and sate
my wretched fingers
in ecstatic work,
if I might fashion
eyes and mouth and chin,
if I might take dark bronze
and hammer in
the line beneath your underlip
(the slightly mocking,
slightly cynical smile
you choose to wear)
if I might ease my fingers and my brain
with stroke,
stroke,
stroke,
stroke,
stroke at—something (stone, marble, intent, stable, materialized)
peace,
even magic sleep
might come again.

22 The long *a* rhymes give way to the strong assonance or slant rhymes of the repeated "I might" with "eyes," "line," "slightly," "slightly," and "smile," and (among other sound echoes) the concluding words repeating a long *e* or phonetic /i/ sound: "beneath," "slightly," "ease," "some*thing*," "mater*i*alized," "peace," "even," "sleep." Visually and aurally, however, this section foregrounds the five repetitions of "stroke," with three of these repetitions constituting an entire line. The exceptionally long line beginning with the fifth repetition of stroke, followed by the again monosyllabic line "peace," similarly dramatizes the simultaneous urgency and uncertainty of the speaker's desire. The visual pattern resembles a Sapphic torn fragment, but the syntax and sound pattern are full and complete. This first section of "Red Roses for Bronze" depends largely on echoes for its progression from the opening conditional "if" to the first manifestation of what the speaker "might" desire and for the hypnotic or incantatory effect of the speaker's conditional wishing: "If I might . . . if I might . . . if I might." H.D. here bypasses opportunities for end-rhyme or traditional rhyme schemes to create a more complex and nuanced interweaving of sounds and sense. In this poem, the density of the aural texture belies the speaker's claimed weakness.

23 In *Trilogy*, H.D. rewrites the rhyming couplet as an unrhymed sequence of two lines of varying length as its defining structure. These lines range from a single word to repeated 8-syllable, 4-beat units. This variant of the traditional syntactically closed and rhyming couplet form is strikingly effective in its nimbleness for the reflections of this long poem on war and spiritual survival. As feminist criticism on H.D. has long established, especially in her later poems the poet takes on masculinist genre constructions as well as patriarchal assumptions and institutions, reconceiving the epic as well as the couplet.[10] H.D.'s line in this long series of couplets composing a narrative-lyric psychological-historical mythology of maps for surviving human destructiveness could not be more different from Pope's couplets, Miltonic blank verse, or Homeric narrative, but it has equal force in its incantatory intensity constructed through its spiraling repetitions of concept and sound. Lines epitomizing this new couplet's tensile

flexibility and sound play occur in an italicized section at the end of "The Walls Do Not Fall":

> We know no rule
> of procedure,
>
> we are voyagers, discoverers
> of the not-known,
>
> the unrecorded;
> we have no map;
>
> possibly we will reach haven,
> heaven. (543)

24 Rather than structuring her couplet by meter and end-rhyme, H.D. creates structural units through internal rhyme or sound play and repetitions of words or ideas. For example, we hear the full or slant rhyming of "know no . . . procedure," "are voyagers, discoverers," "not-known," "unrecorded . . . no," "have . . . map," "possibly we . . . reach," and "haven, / heaven."

25 Later in *Trilogy*, H.D. uses longer lined couplets to represent the meaningless repetition of men's excuses for violence and war:

> Yours is the more foolish circling,
> yours is the senseless wheeling
>
> round and round—yours has no reason—
> I am seeking heaven;
> . . . .
> but you repeat your foolish circling—again, again, again;
> again, the steel sharpened on the stone; (582)

26 Here the same sound brilliantly distinguishes men's "wheeling" without "reason," "repeat[ing]" the sharpening of "steel" while the female speaker is "seeking" a place free of this repetition of violence. H.D.'s redefining of the line as a stage for sound-play, syncopated with repetitions and the variable length of her line, gives form to her interest in physical embodiment or intensely felt presence and to the politics of her radical rewriting of masculinist values and ontology. At the level of genre and the line, H.D. rethinks relationships between history, violence, the nation, the individual, and poetry. As with Loy's visual experiments with white space and punctuation, H.D.'s breaking of the line into very short units that combine sparse syntax, repetition, and lush sound play now seems so much a part of the formal vocabulary of free verse that we do not easily recognize its newness in the 1910s.

Stein's "difference"

27 In *Tender Buttons*, in 1914, Gertrude Stein rejected the poetic line altogether, writing prose poems that foregrounded grammatical innovation. A typical example occurs in the first poem of the first section of this volume, "A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS":

> A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading. (1990, 461)

28 In this passage, Stein uses tools of repetition, sound play, juxtaposition, and abstraction similar to those of Loy and H.D. but her paragraph form calls more attention to the conceptual unit than to any formal element associated with verse. Here and in her later writing, Stein uses language as a medium to destabilize thought, particularly the kind of thinking associated with patriarchal logic and categorization. Her provocative, illogical or even non-sensical definitions and combinations of distinct fields of meaning were meant to stimulate thinking of all kinds—including about language itself. This opening of mental doors through the playful destabilization of grammar and meaning also functions in *Tender Buttons* to provoke new thinking about the structures, materials, and activity of ordinary women's lives (the primary sections of this book are titled "Objects," "Food," and "Rooms")—and even more specifically about the domestic and sexual economies of lesbian life.

29 Unlike Loy, H.D., and Moore, Stein did not continue to develop her early experimentation with prose poems as poetic form, instead focusing on her new deployment or re-conception of grammatical categories in all genres. Even in her later verse, the line receives little attention as a formal unit. In *Stanzas in Meditation* (written in the 1930s), Stein writes in stanzas, beginning each line with a capital letter, and making all lines coincide with syntactic boundaries—although the syntax itself is distinctive and Stein's line breaks call attention to her repetition.[11] For example, in Part 3, she writes:

> It is remarkable how quickly they learn
> But if they learn and it is very remarkable how quickly they learn
> It makes not only but by and by
> And they can not only be not here
> But not there
> Which after all makes no difference
> After all this does not make any does not make any difference

30 Structurally, these lines are as much Whitmanian as modernist, given their line-initial capitals and syntactic definition. The form of the poem is not for Stein its most exciting element. In fact, in "Poetry and Grammar," Stein writes at greatest length about the "exciting thing happening" with her "sentences and paragraphs" in a novel. When she does define poetry, it is in terms of what she calls "vocabulary": "Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns. That is what poetry does, that is what poetry has to do no matter what kind of poetry it is. . . . poetry [is] really loving the name of anything" (231-232). It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that the serendipities of Stein's prose-poetry lines and complications of her grammar became influential on the formal development of poetry.

Moore's Art ifice and Equalities

31 While Stein's rejection of the line as a determining unit of verse in *Tender Buttons* may have been the most radical gesture of this decade, Marianne Moore most radically reconceived the poetic line as such. Rather than experiment with free verse, Moore developed a syllabic stanza and line—that is, a form in which lines are organized by numbers of syllables, not by patterned accents or syntax. Like her peers, she played with rhythm, sound, conceptions of naturalness and artifice, and the visual space of the

page, but by 1916 she was also calling into question the still lingering expectation that a line be a unit of meaning. In her verse, prose syntax is disrupted by ostentatiously arbitrary lineation, creating patterned static visual forms. Through her syllabic stanzas, Moore may be the first poet to develop seriously the practice of imposed constraints. In "Humility, Concentration, and Gusto," Moore encourages poets to reject "anything that might cloud the impression, such as unnecessary commas, modifying clauses, or delayed predicates" (1986, 421). What matters is "honest[y]," "concentration," "impassioned explicitness"; "gusto thrives on freedom, and freedom in art, as in life, is the result of a discipline imposed by ourselves," she claims (1986, 422, 426). Art is artifice and it has to do not just with freedom of form but with will, intention, values, and therefore implicitly with the largest questions one can ask about history and culture.

32 Moore's syllabic verse highlights the artificiality of all formal choice by juxtaposing shorter and longer lines without accentual meter within exactly repeated stanzas, visually arranged. For example, she repeats a sequence of lines of 6, 12, 8, 10, and 14 syllables in "In This Age of Hard Trying Nonchalance is Good And"—a title that simultaneously functions as the poem's first line. Some of Moore's syllabic lines are as short as one syllable, as in "The Fish." Others are as long as 24-syllables—as in "Roses Only," where the stanza repeats lines of 21, 24, 17, 24, and 8 syllables, consecutively:

You do not seem to realize that beauty is a liability rather than
  an asset—that in view of the fact that spirit creates form we are justified in supposing
    that you must have brains. For you, a symbol of the unit, stiff and sharp,
  conscious of surpassing by dint of native superiority and liking for everything
self-dependent, anything an

ambitious civilization might produce: for you, unaided to attempt through sheer
  reserve, to confute presumptions resulting from observation, is idle. You cannot make us
    think you a delightful happen-so. But rose, if you are brilliant it
  is not because your petals are the without-which-nothing of pre-eminence. You would, minus thorns,
look like a what-is-this, a mere

peculiarity. They are not proof against a worm, the elements, or mildew
  but what about the predatory hand? What is brilliance without co-ordination? Guarding the
    infinitesimal pieces of your mind, compelling audience to
  the remark that it is better to be forgotten than to be remembered too violently,
your thorns are the best part of you.

(2002, 83)[12]

33 As this poem demonstrates, in Moore's syllabic verse, lines and even stanzas may end in the middle of a minor syntactic phrase on a word like "an" (as the first stanza does here) and often no stanza in the poem both begins a new sentence and concludes with the end of any major syntactic unit, let alone a period. The concluding line of "Roses Only," has particular force because it is so surprising to find a line that functions as an independent syntactic unit. Many of her poems contain no such line, and this is the only one in "Roses Only." In a poem where Moore instructs women to attend less to their petals and argues that beauty without "brains" or "co-ordination"—like a rose without thorns—would be a "mere // Peculiarity," it is fitting that the final line can stand alone. It demonstrates the "Self-dependent" quality and the "brilliance" she attributes to women, whether or not they value them above their more conventionally praised features. Although, as she says, thorns "are not proof against a worm, the elements, or mildew," they do guard against the "predatory hand"— a telling metonymy pointing toward a culture that had long romanticized male aggressive

possessiveness and in which marriage is figured as the woman's giving her "hand" to her husband; as a symbol of "brilliance" and independence, "Your thorns are the best part of you."

34 Moore's titles often function as a first line: they do not announce a topic or guide the reader toward comprehension of the following text. "The Fish" is not about fish but about the delicate beauty and versatile strength of natural ecologies in the face of human destructiveness caused by thoughtless acquisitiveness and war; the title simply places us in the first phase of the scene she maps in the poem (The Fish // wade . . .). Beginning a poem with the first line/title "In This Age of Hard Trying Nonchalance is Good And" departs from traditional and free verse form even more strikingly by ending with "and"—that is, ending in a way that is obviously in the middle of some thought. This "And" is particularly inconclusive because there is no obvious connection between the title's relatively formal proposition about "Nonchalance" and the next line's (also unfinished) quoted colloquialism ("'Really, it is not the / business of the gods . . .'"). Such an opening suggests that every aspect of poetry has equal consequence or inconsequence: a title may not announce a primary theme; a line's end may not mark a point of emphasis; a rhyme may not have significant consonance or contrast in meaning with its partner. All syllables are counted the same. Her line calls striking attention to itself as a visual unit but can rarely be understood as a unit of meaning independent of its sentence, or more often of the poem, since Moore's most easily comprehensible phrases may be ironic in the play of the poem as whole.

35 According to Charles Olson, the line "comes [...] from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes" ("Projective Verse"); in contrast, Moore constructs a line of no predictable length or relation to syntax, hence no predictable relation to the sentence, the breath, or any other property of constructed meaning or natural being.[13] Just as physical appearance gives body to the performance of selfhood without determining it, Moore's structures give a poem's language distinctive, even delightful, form while forcing a reader to recognize its idiosyncrasy and find what is of value in it. In the decade that saw the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan (1915) and the increasing popularity of eugenics, Moore's quiet insistence on the arbitrariness of embodiment and radical forms of equality was entirely consonant with her feminist politics (see Miller, 1995, 135-36).

36 The need for individual social responsibility, condemnation of egotism, and attention to the unnoticed or marginalized are articulated through formal structures in Moore's 1916 "In This Age of Hard Trying."

In This Age of Hard Trying, Nonchalance is Good And

"Really, it is not the
business of the gods to bake clay pots." They did not
do it in this instance. A few
revolved upon the axes of their worth
as if excessive popularity might be a pot;

they did not venture the
profession of humility. The polished wedge
that might have split the firmament
was dumb. At last it threw itself away
and falling down, conferred on some poor fool, a privilege.

"Taller by the length of
a conversation of five hundred years than all
the others," there was one, whose tales
of what could never have been actual—
were better than the haggish, uncompanionable drawl

of certitude; his by-
play was more terrible in its effectiveness
than the fiercest frontal attack.
The staff, the bag, the feigned inconsequence
of manner, best bespeak that weapon, self protectiveness.[14]

37 Here, Moore condemns all those who set themselves up as "gods" too important to be useful and too lazy or arrogant to take advantage of the tools at their disposal ("the polished wedge"). By implication, they speak with "the haggish uncompanionable drawl / of certitude." In contrast to such over-determined self-importance, she places the figure of the "fool" or hobo (with "staff" and "bag"), who tells "tales" and whose "conversation" is worth attending to both because of its "terrible [...] effectiveness" and because it *is* "[...] companionable." Those with privileges and power begin with tools "that might have split the firmament," but they neither "bake clay pots" nor make any other use of what they have. Nor do they participate in conversation, like that implied in the exchange of story telling. Consequently, it is the conversational nobodys, those who do "profess [...] humility" and "bake clay pots," who may change the world.

38 This poem was written during World War I, before the U.S. entered the conflict in 1917. While in principle a pacifist, Moore was distressed at the suffering of the British and French and at apparent U.S. callousness in the face of their need. In this poem, she seems to claim for artists and other "fools" professing "what could never have been actual" a greater and longer-lasting power than that of the reigning "gods." The historical moment of this poem's publication and the military language of its conclusion (*fiercest frontal attack*, *terrible*, *weapon*) suggest that Moore's "gods" may stand in for political leaders caught up in their own self-importance rather than using their tools to aid countries under attack or promote other communal good. The "weapon" of "by / play" or conversational interaction, in this reading, protects the self from its own potential god-like arrogance and inactivity rather than protecting the self against others—aggressively or defensively.[15] Such "self-protectiveness" could not be more different from that based on defensive weaponry, the desire for "excessive popularity" (winning elections?), or maintaining the status quo in an "Age of Hard Trying." For Moore, the principle of "by- / play" destabilizes meaning as well as stances of certitude. Appropriately, the word "by- / play" is divided by a line break: its very appearance on the page celebrates structures open to idiosyncrasy, the deviant, that which does not attack to reconfirm certitudes.

39 The "by-play" of carefully crafted "nonchalance" also appears in Moore's development of unaccented rhyme. Moore's lines are full of sound-play but rarely have the aural lushness of H.D.'s because Moore gives no accentual, aural, grammatical, or syntactic prominence to her rhymes. In "In This Age," for example, she rhymes "the" with the mid-line "humility" in stanza 2 ("they did not venture the / profession of humility).[16] Moore often indents rhyming lines the same distance from the left margin, but one often cannot hear the end-rhyme one sees because so many other words occur between the rhyming syllables and the syllables themselves are so minor (note the rhyme of

"effectiveness" with "protectiveness" in the final stanza of "In This Age"). Moore even occasionally rhymes on an internal syllable of a polysyllabic word divided by a line break. To return to her 1917 poem "The Fish," the first syllable of "ac-cident" concludes a line and rhymes with "lack."

> All
> external
> marks of abuse are present on
> this
> defiant edifice—
> all the physical features of
>
> ac-
> cident—lack
> of cornice dynamite grooves, burns,
> and
> hatchet strokes, these things stand
> out on it . . . (2002, 86; lines 31-9)

40 This is a stunning example of the way Moore's lineation constructs her argument. The unusual line-break would seem only accidentally to split the word "accident"—in a poem calling attention to human destructiveness, wrongly dismissed as accidental (like what is now called "collateral damage" in situations of war), as though the destruction of people and the environment did not need to be acknowledged or considered in advance.

41 Like H.D.'s poetry and formal structures, Moore's verse demands attention to that which might easily be overlooked. Formally, for example, because in syllabic verse all syllables have the same value, nothing promotes a monosyllabic noun as a candidate for rhyme above the least-stressed, least semantically significant syllable. Similarly, the repetition of stanzas on the page creates a repeated and static visual design. In contrast, Moore's sentences demand dynamic, sequential interpretation, in dependent relation to what precedes and follows them. In them, there is nothing fixed or predictable. Moore's sentences wind through her stanzas, in dynamic counterpoint to their fixed visual structures and patterned rhymes. As Linda Leavell points out, this synthesis of the "verbal and the visual, the dramatic and the spatial" is "one of [Moore's] greatest achievements as a modernist" (57).[17]

The Feminist Modernist Line

42 Loy, H.D., and Moore each develop a dynamic line: without accentual meter or regular rhyme, their lines do not breathe but they express a corporeality of movement and a pleasure in beats, sounds, and rhythms that demand our attention and call us to similar alertness or nimbleness of thought. H.D.'s lines are the most easily excerptible as units of meaning, and her repeated "I have had enough" from "Sheltered Garden" would be a strong candidate for the modernist "line" as a rallying cry of these early feminist innovators. All three of these poets redefine concepts of beauty as well as of the line. Later in "Sheltered Garden" H.D. rejects "beauty without strength," seeking "to find a new beauty / in some terrible / wind-tortured place." In Loy's "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," Ova makes "moon-flowers out of muck," and in her "Apology of Genius" artists "forge the dusk of Chaos / to that imperious jewellery of the Universe / —the Beautiful —" (*sic*; 1996, 78). For all three of these poets, poetry appropriately includes the

mundane, the daily, the difficult, the serendipitous. As previously indicated, in "Roses Only," Moore reminds women/roses that "it is better to be forgotten than to be remembered too violently," concluding "Your thorns are the best part of you." In "The Monkey Puzzle" (1925), she similarly redefines aesthetic value: "This porcupine-quilled, complicated starkness— / this is beauty" (1981, 80). And in the poem called "Poetry" (1919) she defines it as above all "a place for the genuine"; the poem should consist of or include "the raw material of poetry in / all its rawness," "imaginary gardens with real toads in them'" (2002, 72).

43 At the same time, the repetitions, intricate sound play, and interlinking syntactic structures of H.D's, Loy's, and Moore's verse suggest that their feminist line rebels against the idea of poetry as the result of an isolated act of solitary genius. Loy's artist may be "ostracized" but that artist is not alone: "we are" together in attempting new ways to create and conceive art. As Moore says, "truth is no Apollo / Belvedere, no formal thing" but something that develops in complex ways among people of various cultures, feelings, and needs. In "Marriage," Moore writes that "'no truth can be fully known / until it has been tried / by the tooth of disputation" and in "People's Surroundings" she admits that the evidence we look at to inform us about others in fact produces "questions more than answers." For these poets the modernist line is about seeking, building from the fragments of what is known,—as Loy puts it, in a one-sentence poem titled "Gertrude Stein," about "crush[ing] / the tonnage / of consciousness [E0 58]...[E0 50] to extract / a radium of the word" (1996, 94). And perhaps after all Stein says it best in *Tender Buttons*, in the section called "A Long Dress" and concluding "A line distinguishes it. A line just distinguishes it."

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NOTES

1. My thanks to the participants in the "Modernist Revolutions" conference for questions and presentations that have helped me clarify parts of this essay, especially to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Elizabeth Willis, Clément Oudart, and Nicholas Manning.

2. Williams defines his "variable foot" in his "Interview with Stanley Koehler." It in effect makes each line into a three-part stanza, spaced both vertically and horizontally across a page rather than only vertically. As is frequently mentioned, Pound first develops his concept of *logopoeia* in his 1918 essay "Marianne Moore and Mina Loy," a concept that becomes the foundation for his later poetry.

3. To give just one example, Mallarmé uses a tripartite line in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* (1876):

I hold the queen!
O certain punishment...
No, but the soul

In this rhymed and metered poem, however, lines are overwhelmingly written flush left or at most indicate indentation for a new sentence or aspect of speech ("Je tiens la reine !/Ô sûr châtiment.../Non, mais l'âme," Mallarmé, 165-166). This is markedly different from Loy's or Moore's repeated use of particular features throughout their early work.

4. Moore published reviews of most major poets and publications in the 1910s and several essays with implicit relation to her verse, but none calling for particular formal structures, making claims about her own achievement, or espousing a new movement; see "Humility, Concentration, and Gusto," "Feeling and Precision," and "The Accented Syllable." In 1927, H.D. founded the first journal of film criticism *Close-Up* (with Bryher and Kenneth MacPherson) but published relatively few essays in her lifetime and nothing like a manifesto. Neither Loy's "Aphorisms on Futurism," "tenets" on "International Psycho-Democracy," "Modernist Poetry," and (posthumously published) "Feminist Manifesto" nor her few other published essays define a new model of verse or call upon others to adhere to particular principles of verse. Stein's 1927 "Patriarchal Poetry" and 1935 "Poetry and Grammar" have functioned together with *Tender Buttons* in establishing the basis of Stein's influence on late twentieth-century LANGUAGE and other experimentalist poetry, but they were not influential on early developments of the line. In fact, with the exception of Stein's, the essays of these poets were largely ignored for most of the twentieth century—unlike essays by Pound and Eliot, which were frequently reprinted, quoted, and taught—and even Stein's essays began circulating actively only in the late 1960s.

5. See Miller, *Cultures of Modernism* (2005) and "Marianne Moore and the Women Modernizing New York" (2000).

6. Quoted from Januzzi, *Reconstr[uing] Scars*, 141. There is currently no copy of the complete "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" in print, although a text modifying Loy's punctuation and spacing is available in the 1982 *Last Lunar Baedeker*.

7. Again, because there are no extant manuscripts for several of Loy's poems we cannot know exactly how she wrote them out—with what kinds of dashes and gaps. We also cannot be certain where spatial gaps have been entirely edited out of printed poems. Marisa Januzzi notes that many spaces between words are closed or reduced in typescripts for her 1958 *Lunar Baedeker & Time Tables* edition; it is likely, however, that *Others* and *The Dial* published her lines as she wrote them, or at least with careful attention to following the author's "extensity" and "intension" (199).

8. H.D.'s first publication of poetry was in *Poetry*, January 1913.

9. Lara Vetter points out H.D.'s extreme use of repetition, often in one or two-word lines, in her volume *Red Roses for Bronze*, arguing that here she experiments with ways to "model poetry on incantation" (101). Diana Collecott also writes about H.D.'s vibrantly "kinetic" line as stemming in part from her use of monosyllabic lines and repetition (95).

10. Early and groundbreaking feminist criticism on H.D. includes work by Susan Stanford Friedman, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and Cassandra Laity.

11. Stein's *Stanzas* were first published in *Poetry* in 1957; I quote here from *Stanzas in Meditation and Other Poems*. See also the recently published *Stanzas in Meditation. The Corrected Version*.

12. First published in Others: An Anthology of the New Verse (Knopf, 1917), ed. Alfred Kreymborg.

13. Moore is no closer to Elizabeth Bishop's claim that "Writing poetry is an unnatural act. It takes great skill to make it seem natural" (207); Moore does not want to give the impression of naturalness in the poetic act or form.

14. First published in *Chimaera* in 1916; I quote from the version published in *Observations* 1924 (Moore, 2002, 70). The source of Moore's quotations is Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons*, in which a manipulative character tries to persuade another to join him by representing the two of them as "gods" above the "louts."

15. I have written about this aspect of Moore's poetic in *Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority* and "Distrusting: Marianne Moore on Feeling and War in the 1940s."

16. See Moore's essay "The Accented Syllable" on this aspect of her verse (1986, 31-34).

17. Leavell further notes that Moore developed her syllabic stanza as early as 1915, when her peers were "looking to the painters—or, more accurately, looking *with* the painters—for new forms. The adulation Moore received from other poets in the late teens indicates that her stanza did represent what they were all in various ways seeking" (80).

ABSTRACTS

Of the five English-language poets who experimented most radically with the poetic line in the 1910s, four were women: Mina Loy, H.D., Marianne Moore, and to a lesser extent Gertrude Stein, since she rejected the poetic line altogether in *Tender Buttons*. The crucial moves away from Whitman's nineteenth-century aesthetic had to do with the line as seen, as independent of syntax and meter, as restructuring the possibilities of rhyme, and as a unit in tension with other aspects of form, narrative, and voice in a poem. In the hands of these women, the modernist line had appeared in almost every radical configuration of high modernism by the end of 1917. This paper explores the particular innovations of these women in relation to the structures of the modernist poetic line.

Des cinq poètes de langue anglaise ayant mené les expérimentations les plus radicales avec le vers dans les années 1910, quatre furent des femmes: Mina Loy, H.D., Marianne Moore et, dans une moindre mesure, Gertrude Stein, puisqu'elle décida d'abolir entièrement la notion de vers dans *Tender Buttons*. Visant à se défaire de l'esthétique whitmanienne et, d'un même geste, du XIX^e^ siècle, ces innovations reposèrent sur le vers en tant qu'objet visuel, détaché de la syntaxe et du mètre, permettant ainsi d'ouvrir le champ des possibles de la rime, mais aussi en tant qu'unité mise en tension avec d'autres aspects formels, la dimension narrative et le rôle de la voix dans le poème. Placé entre les mains de ces femmes, le vers moderniste aura ainsi apparu dans les configurations les plus expérimentales du premier modernisme, ce même avant 1917. Cet article analyse les innovations de ces femmes en lien avec les modalités et les structures du vers moderniste.

INDEX

Keywords: modernist poetry, innovation, the poetic line, form, Mina Loy, H.D., Marianne Moore, Gertrude Stein
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